

A
PASTORAL LETTER

FROM A
MINISTER
TO HIS

Parishioners,

Being an Earnest

EXHORTATION

To them to take

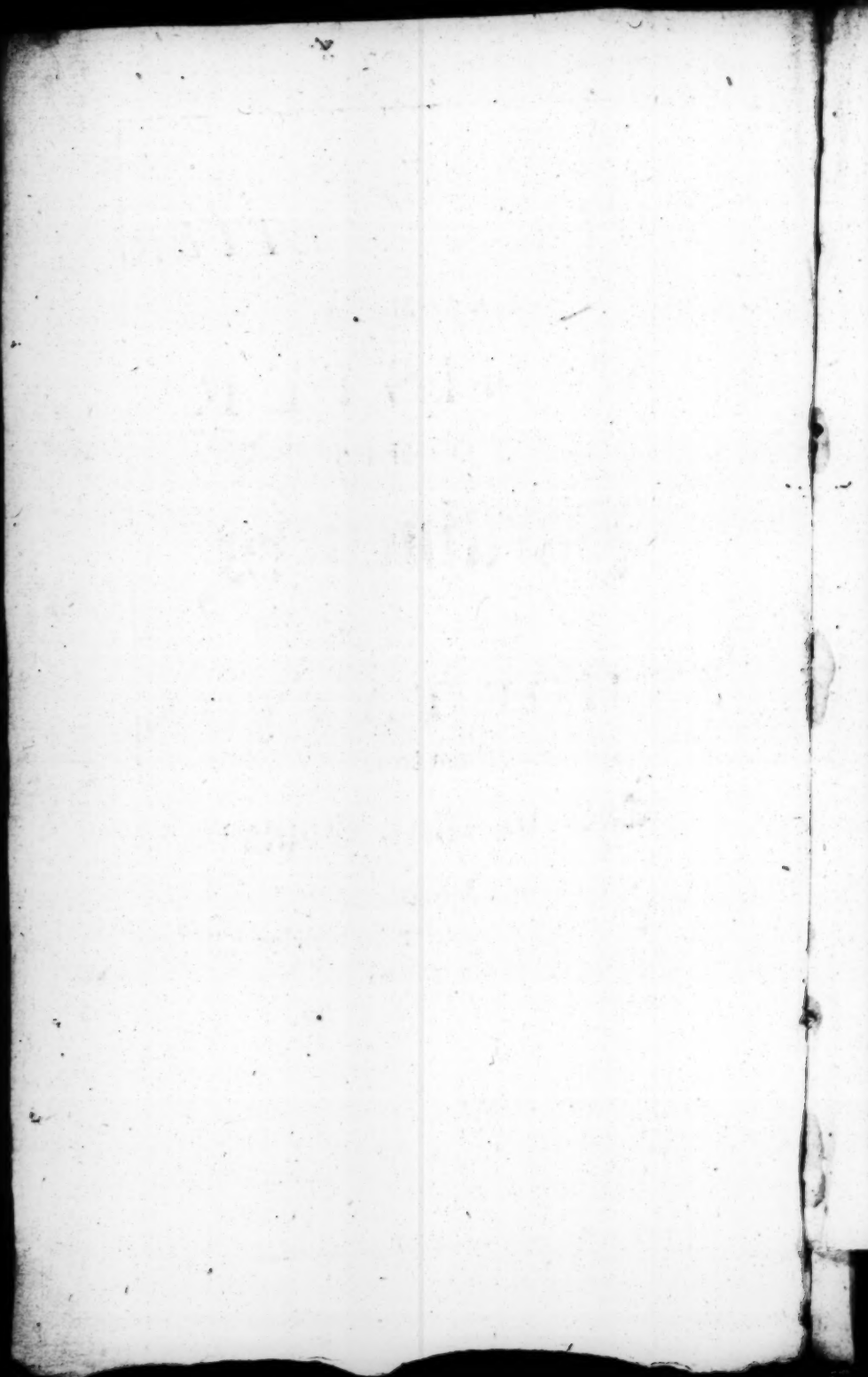
Care of their Souls;

AND

A Preparative in order to render all his
Future Methods of Instruction more
effectual to their Edification.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *W. HaVES*, Bookseller, at the
Rose in *Ludgate-street*, 1700.



*The Earnest Exhortation of a Minister
to his Parishioners to take Care of their
Souls.*

Most Dearly Beloved Neighbours,

MY Hearts desire and Prayer to God for you is, that you may be Saved; and my most sincere Endeavours shall ever be, by all Christian Methods I can think of, to promote your Salvation. And being I cannot hope, either by *Doctrine*, or by *Reproof*, or by *Instruction in Righteousness*, to prevail upon those, to comply with any Methods I can devise for the good of their Souls, who are not thoroughly sensible of the *worth* of them; I think it requisite, in order to make my future Labours more effectual with you, to lay before you such Considerations, as may make you sensible of the inestimable Value of your Immortal Souls.

I take it for granted, that you believe you have Souls. My Business is to awaken you to a serious Concern for their everlasting Welfare; a Concern the most necessary of all others, and yet, I fear, very little laid to Heart; for otherwise, the generality of Men could not possibly live as they do: They would not imploy all their Care and Pains in providing a Maintenance for these perishing Bodies, and leave the most valuable part of themselves, their Souls, altogether neglected.

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Were we to die as the brute Beasts, and, that when our dead Bodies are laid in the Grave, there were an end of us; if this determin'd all our Hopes and Fears, and we returned to our native Dust therein to remain for ever; then might we Eat, and Drink, and take our fill of Pleasure in this World, as too many do: But if the Soul, when it leaves the Body, does immediately enter into a state of Happiness, or Misery; if there be a Resurrection both of the Just and the Unjust, as most certainly there is; if a future Account must be given of every thing done in the Body, Whether it be Good, or whether it be Evil; and if our eternal State shall be appointed us, either in Bliss or Torment, according as we have behaved our selves in this Life, as undoubtedly it shall; methinks it behoves every one of us to look well about us, to enquire seriously what we have been doing all this while; whicher the Path we are in leads us, and what will our future State be.

In order to perswade you to apply your thoughts to these most important Considerations, I know no Method which (through God's Blessing) seemeth more likely, than to lay before you the inestimable Value of your Souls; the infinite Concern you have in their Welfare; how liable they are to be lost and undone for ever; what excellent Provision our most Gracious God hath made for their Security; and how just it will be in him to condemn them to the extremity of Misery, if you wilfully neglect the Care of them.

First, Therefore, I intreat you to consider the great Worth and Value of the Soul. Remember, that it is the immediate Off-spring of God; that
it

it came from Heaven, from the Father of Spirits; *God breathed into Man the Breath of Life, and Man became a living Soul, Gen.2.7. God made Man in his own Image, (not according to the Likeness of any of the rest of the Creatures) a little lower than the Angels, and crowned him with Glory and Immortality.* This is our peculiar Privilege, beyond all the Beings of this lower World, that we resemble our Maker, who is the most excellent Being. This is the Prerogative of that Spiritual and Immortal part of us, our Soul; and consequently the Soul of Man must needs be exceeding Precious & Valuable.

Our Bodies are Houses of Clay, whose Foundations are in the Dust; and though as the Psalmist saith, *they are curiously wrought and fashioned,* yet all the Workmanship bestowed on them, is, that they may be serviceable to our Souls, fit Tabernacles for that Immortal part to dwell in. The Worth whereof will farther appear from that wonderful Esteem those have of it, who may be supposed to be best acquainted with the true Value of Souls.

Thus God the Father takes great Delight in being called, and esteemed, *a Lover of Souls*; and accordingly hath laid out his Thoughts from everlasting, for the bringing in of them to himself. The Councils and Contrivances of Heaven have been spent on them. The Father thought nothing too dear to secure and save them; and therefore when he foresaw we would not continue in that state of Innocence, and Happiness, wherein we were at first created, he contrived to make us capable of another Happiness, and that at no less Expence than the Blood of his own Beloved Son. And certainly God would not have thus concerned himself

about things of little value; no assuredly, our Souls are exceeding Precious in his Eyes, who hath prepared the greatest Happiness for them, and thought nothing too much to secure it.

Again. When the Son of God undertook to rescue them from the Slavery of Sin, and Dominion of the Devil, he thought it sufficiently worth his while to descend from Heaven, and put on the Form of a Servant, and make himself of no Reputation, to live a miserable Life, and die a painful and an accursed Death. And surely he had not so mean an Esteem of his own heavenly Glory, (*Joh. 1. 18.*) as to part with it for Trifles: And then certainly neither can you think your Souls of little worth, when the Son of God thought them worth his dying for. He would not have thought fit to pay so vast a Ransom, as his precious Life, for a thing of small Value; yea, Himself hath assured us, beyond all contradiction, that the Gain of the whole World is not a sufficient Recompence for the Loss of ones Soul.

Again. The Holy Ghost is still carrying on that great Work of God's Mercy in the Salvation of our Souls: For their sakes it is that He hath made so many Revelations of God's Will to the World, and confirmed them by so many Miracles: Therefore He still follows us with his preventing and assisting Graces; He inspires us with good Thoughts, and kindles pious Desires in us; He warmeth our cold Affections, and enflameth our Hearts with Devotion; He checks and restrains us from Sin, and upbraids us when we commit it; He still importuneth, woeth and intreateth, that, if possible, he may awaken us into a Sense of our danger, and
excite

excite and quicken us to pursue the Methods of our own Safety and Happiness. What then are not our Souls worth, about which the Blessed Spirit takes so much care to save and make them happy ?

The Good Angels are Ministring Spirits for the good of Souls ; they pitch their Tents about them, and think it no Disparagement for such glorious Beings as they are to guard them, and converse with them : They still wait to receive the Souls of good Men, when they depart out of the Body : They rejoice at the Conversion of Souls ; a certain Sign that they have an entire Value for them.

Yea, the Devils themselves do know that, in God's Esteem, nothing is so valuable under the whole Heaven, as the Souls of Men ; and therefore, as the greatest Instance of Spite and Malice they can do to God, they make it their utmost endeavour to seduce and destroy them : They envy the Happiness Men are capable of, and accordingly labour in their Destruction, and triumph when they have accomplished it.

Thus you see the Soul is of the greatest Value. How much then does it behove you to take Care of it ? What Madness is it to suffer the Body to engross all your Care and Thoughts, your Labour and Time ; and to permit that precious and immortal part of you, your Soul, to be over-looked as a thing not worth any serious notice or regard ? Especially if you will consider,

Secondly, That the Loss of the Soul is the most intolerable of all other Losses. For indeed the Soul may be lost ; not that it shall cease to be, (it were well for wicked Men if it could) but it may

be undone and miserable, and in that sense lost to all Eternity.--Deprived it may be of that Heaven of Happiness which God hath provided for it; of the Enjoyment of him *in whose Presence is fulness of Joy, and at whose Right-hand there are Pleasures for evermore.* Nor is this all; the Soul is not only capable of being deprived of infinite Bliss, but of being plunged too in the extremity of Despair and Misery; it is liable to be given over to the violence and fury of Devils, and Devilish Spirits; to be committed to the hateful Society of those miserable Beings, where Wrath and Envy, Malice and Ill-nature, only are to be found; where no Joy, no Peace, no Love, ever enter.

The Misery of which dreadful State, the Holy Spirit hath represented by Expressions denoting the greatest Horrour and Torment; by *a Lake of Fire and Brimstone, everlasting Flame, a never-dying Worm, unquenchable Fire, &c.*

This is the dismal State the Souls and Bodies of the wicked will be condemned unto for ever; wherein they must suffer Day and Night, without rest or intermission. O dreadful State! with this addition to the Extremity of Torments, that they will never have an end! Some Comfort it might be to those miserable Souls had they hopes of any Deliverance; but it must needs exceedingly imbitter every Torment to them, to think of that never-ending Duration of Torment to come; that, after they have been in a consuming condition for Millions of Millions of Ages in Hell, they have still an eternal Hell behind, and are as far distant from the end of their Miseries, as they were when they first begun. This must needs plunge the
the

the wretched Soul into extreme Desperation.

This State we are liable to be betrayed unto, we are in great danger of it, and how we came to be so, is what I intreat you in the next Place to consider, and to behave your selves accordingly.

Thirdly, Consider the great danger your Souls are in, by reason of Sin. " God created the " first Man *Adam* without Sin, and indued his " Soul with the full knowledge of his Duty; " and with such a Strength, that he might, if he " would, perform all that was required of him. " Having thus created the first Man, he made a Co- " venant or Agreement with him to this purpose; " that if he continued in obedience to God without " committing Sin; then, first, that strength of " Soul, which he then had, should still be conti- " nued to him; and secondly, that he should ne- " ver die, but continue in a State of Happiness " for ever. But on the other side, if he commit- " ted Sin and disobeyed God, then both he and " all his Children after him should lose that " Knowledge and that perfect Strength, which " enabled him to do all that God required of him: " And secondly, should be subject to Death, and " not only so, but to Eternal Damnation in Hell.

" This was the Agreement made with *Adam*, " and all Mankind in him (which we usually call " the First Covenant) upon which God gave *Adam* " a particular Commandment, which was no more " but this; that he should not presume to eat of one " only Tree of that Garden wherein he had placed " him; which God called *The Tree of the knowledge of " Good and Evil*. But *Adam*, by the perswasion of the " Devil, eats of that Tree, disobeys God, and so

“ brings that first Curse upon himself and all his
 “ Posterity : And so by that one Sin of his, he
 “ lost both those together ; I say , the full
 “ knowledge of his Duty, and the power of per-
 “ forming it. And we being born after his Image,
 “ lost them likewise; and so are become both igno-
 “ rant in discerning what we ought to do, and
 “ weak and unable to the doing of it ; having a
 “ backwardness to all good, and an aptness and
 “ readiness to all Evil ; like a sick Stomach, which
 “ loaths all wholesom Food, and longs after such
 “ Trash as may nourish the Disease.

This is the Source and Original of all our Mi-
 sery. The Consequence hereof is, that we are
 now exposed to an infinite Number of Tempta-
 tions from the World, the Devil, and our own
 corrupt Nature ; that we are ready and inclined
 to hearken to them, and sin against our Maker ;
 and thereby are in continual danger of being be-
 trayed to that miserable State before described.
 And this, I hope, may be sufficient at present to
 assure you, that your Souls are in Danger. And
 yet that you may not neglect them as past hopes,
 but may be encouraged to set your selves in good
 earnest to take care of them. Consider,

Fourthly, What an excellent provision it hath
pleased God, in his wonderful Mercy, to make
in order to rescue and deliver them from these
dangers ; and what is required of us in compli-
ance with this great Mercy. This God hath done
 by giving us his Son, and in him making a New
 Covenant with us, after we had broken the first.

“ *He has given us his Son, as the great Captain*
 “ *of our Salvation, to Redeem and Rescue us from*
 “ *the Power and Dominion of the Devil or Satan,*
 “ that

" that great Rebel against God ; from whom the
 " Devil having caused us to Revolt, he carries us
 " captive at his Will, causing us to fight against
 " our Maker, as many as he can detain in his Servi-
 " tude : But God, I say, has *given us his Son* to
 " Rescue and Recover us out of such a fearful
 " State of Sin, Rebellion, and Misery.

" And this he has done by making in him a
 " New Covenant with us, after we had broken
 " the First, that is, by proposing the most
 " gracious Terms of Reconciliation, through
 " him our great Mediator and Redeemer ; And,
 " by making Satisfaction, as for our Breach of the
 " first Covenant, so for the Sins of as many of us as
 " truly repent of our Transgressions under the
 " Second.

" This second Covenant was made with *Adam*,
 " and us in him, presently after his Fall, and is
 " briefly contained in these Words, *Gen. 3. 15.*
 " where God declares, that *The Seed of the Wo-*
 " *man should break the Serpents head* ; and this Se-
 " cond Covenant is made up, as the first was, of
 " some Mercies to be afforded by God, and some
 " Duties to be performed by us.

" God herein promised to send on Earth, his
 " only Son, who is God equal with himself, to
 " become Man like unto us in all things ; Sin
 " only excepted, and he to do for us these seve-
 " ral things.

" 1. To make known to us the whole will of
 " his Father in the performance whereof we shall
 " be sure to be accepted and rewarded by him.
 " And this was one part of his business, which he
 " performed in those many Sermons, Doctrines and
 " Precepts

“Precepts we find set down in the Gospel. And
 “herein he is our Prophet, for it was the work of
 “a Prophet of old not only to foretel, but to
 “teach. Our duty in this particular is to heark-
 “en diligently to him, to be most ready and
 “desirous to learn that Will of God which he
 “came from Heaven to reveal to us.

“2. The second thing he was to do for us, was
 “to satisfie God for our Sins, not only that one
 “of *Adam*, but all the Sins of Mankind that tru-
 “ly repent and amend, and by this means to ob-
 “tain for us forgiveness of Sins, and the favour of
 “God; and to redeem us from Hell and Eternal
 “Damnation, which was the punishment due to
 “our Sin. All this he did for us by his Death:
 “He offered up himself a Sacrifice for the Sins
 “of all those who heartily bewail and forsake
 “them. And in this he is our Priest, it being an-
 “ciently the Priest’s Office to offer Sacrifice for
 “the sins of the People. Our duty in this parti-
 “cular is first, truly and heartily to repent of our
 “sins, and to forsake them, without which they
 “will never be forgiven us, though that is the
 “thing for which Christ died. Secondly, stedfastly
 “to believe, that if we give our selves up to Christ,
 “we shall have the benefits of that Sacrifice of his;
 “that all our sins, how many and great soever, shall
 “be forgiven us, and we shall be saved from those
 “Eternal Punishments which were due unto us
 “for them. Another part of the Priest’s office
 “was Blessing and Praying for the People; and
 “this also Christ performs for us. It was his spe-
 “cial Commission from his Father to Bless us, as
 “*St. Peter* tells us, *Acts 3 26.* *God sent his Son*
 “*Jesus to bless you;* and the following Words
 “*the*

" shew wherein that Blessing consists, *in turning a-*
 " *way every one of you from your Iniquity:* Those
 " means which he hath used for the turning of us
 " from our sins, are to be reckoned of all other,
 " the greatest Blessings; and for the other part,
 " that of Praying, that he not only performed on
 " Earth, but continues still to do it in Heaven,
 " *He sits on the right hand of God and makes request*
 " *for us,* Rom. 8. 34. Our duty herein is, not to
 " resist this unspeakable Blessing of his, but to be
 " willing to be thus blest in being turned from our
 " sins; and not to make void and fruitless all his
 " Prayers and Intercessions for us, which will never
 " prevail for us, whilst we continue in our Sins.

" 3. The third thing that Christ was to do for
 " us, was to enable us, or to give us strength to do
 " what God requires of us. This he doth, First,
 " By taking off from the hardness of the Law
 " given to *Adam*, which bound us never to commit
 " the least sin, upon the pain of Damnation. So
 " that now God requires of us only an honest
 " and hearty endeavour to do what we are able,
 " and where we fail of that through weakness, he
 " accepts of our sincere Repentance. Second-
 " ly, By sending his Holy Spirit into our Hearts
 " to govern and rule us, to give us strength to
 " overcome Temptations to Sin, and to do all
 " that he now under the Gospel requires of us.
 " And in this Christ is our King, it being the office of
 " a King to Govern and Rule, and to subdue our
 " Enemies. Our duty in this particular is to give
 " up our selves to be obedient Subjects of his; to
 " be governed and ruled by him, to obey all his
 " Laws, not to take part with any Rebel, that is,
 " not to cherish any one sin, but diligently to pray
 " for

“ for his Grace to enable us to subdue them all, and
 “ then carefully to make use of it to that pur-
 “ pose.

“ Lastly, He has purchased for all that faith-
 “ fully obey him, an eternal glorious Inheritance,
 “ the Kingdom of Heaven, whither he is gone be-
 “ fore to take possession for us. Our duty here-
 “ in is to be exceeding careful that we forfeit not
 “ our parts in it; which we shall certainly do, if
 “ we continue impenitent in any sin. Secondly,
 “ Not to fasten our Affections on this World, but
 “ to raise them up to Heaven and Heavenly
 “ Things, according to the Precept of the Apostle,
 “ *Col. 3. 2. Set your Affections on things above, and not*
 “ *on things on the Earth*, continually longing to
 “ come to the possession of that blessed Inheri-
 “ tance of ours, in comparison whereof all things
 “ here below should seem vile and mean to us.

“ This is the sum of that second Covenant we
 “ are now under, wherein you see what Christ
 “ hath done, how he executes those three great
 “ Offices of King, Priest and Prophet; as also
 “ what is required of us, without our faithful
 “ performance of which, all that he hath done
 “ shall never stand us in any stead; for he will
 “ never be a Priest to save any, who take him not
 “ also for their Prophet to teach, and their
 “ King to rule them; nay if we neglect our part
 “ of this Covenant, our condition will be yet worse
 “ than if it had never been made; for we shall be
 “ to answer not for the breach of Law only, as
 “ in the first Covenant, but for the abuse of Mer-
 “ cy, which is of all sins the most provoking. On
 “ the other side, if we faithfully perform it, that
 “ is,

“ is, set our selves heartily to the obeying of every Precept of Christ; not going on wilfully in any one sin, but bewailing and forsaking what ever we have formerly been guilty of, it is then most certain that all the forementioned Benefits of Christ belong to us.

“ And now you see how little reason you have to cast off the care of your Souls, upon a conceit that they are past cure; for that it is plain they are not; nay certainly they are in that very condition, which of all others makes them fittest for our care. If they had not been thus Redeemed by Christ, they had been then so hopeless, that care would have been in vain: On the other side, if his Redemption had been such that all Men should be saved by it, though they live as they list, we should have thought it needless to take care for them, because they were safe without it. But it hath pleased God so to order it, that our care must be the means by which they must receive the good even of all that Christ hath done for them.

And now, if you will but lay these things to Heart, your Reason and your Interest will both direct you how to behave your selves. Methinks I hear some of you, as Men deeply affected with the sense of these things, with a serious and compassionate regard to their Souls, crying out with St. Peter's hearers, *Men and Brethren, what must we do to be saved?* I would to God, that every Man would make this application to himself; and if they do not, it is too certain a sign, that either they believe that they have no immortal Souls, or that it is impossible they should for ever miscarry.

Give

Give me leave a little to reason the case with you, my dear Neighbours, to perswade you to take care of your Souls. Are they made after the image and similitude of God? Why then will ye suffer them to be transformed to the image of Satan? Has God provided a Heaven of Happiness for them? Why will ye be so cruel and unjust to them as to expose them to the intolerable Flames of Hell? Since God the Father hath rated them at the highest value, and expressed his chief concern for them: Why will ye neglect and undervalue them as things of no price? since God the Son thought not his own Blood too great a price for them, Why do ye chuse to sell them for the trifling Vanities of this World? since the Holy Ghost is continually at work to preserve them, Whence comes it to pass that ye hardly think them worthy the slenderest part of your care? since the blessed Angels are imployed in ministring unto them: Why do ye defeat all their endeavours for your good? since they rejoice at the Conversion of Souls; Why will ye refuse to afford them this matter of rejoicing, where the greatest advantage will be your own? Wherefore do you seek to gratifie our common Adversary the Devil so far, as to permit him to disappoint the gracious purposes of God towards us? Oh that Men can be so senseless as to see their Souls perishing before their Eyes, without Remorse or Compassion! that they can pass day after day without making any offer or attempt to recover them.

Consider you have not only the sin of your first Parents to be forgiven you, but also innumerable Actual sins of your own; and those perhaps committed

mitted against the light of your own Consciences, against the exprefs command of God, against the dictates of the Holy Spirit, against frequent Warnings and Admonitions from others, and contrary to many repeated Vows and Resolutions. These are aggravations sufficient to sink a Soul into the Bottomless Pit; and yet still there is hope, there is a remedy even for such Sinners, if they repent and return from their Sins, and become sincerely obedient to the Laws of God, and accept the Lord *Jesui* as their King, their Priest, and their Prophet, God will for his sake accept them. *Remember that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as Silver and Gold but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without Blemish, and without Spot, 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19.* This was the ransom of Souls which God required; and if you reject this he will accept no other, and you do reject it (and God so interprets it) if you do not accept him upon his own terms; if you do not give up your selves unto Christ, to be guided and governed, as well as saved by him; otherwise you renounce all your part and interest in his Blood, and do as it were, declare you will not be beholding to him: And then surely you cannot complain that God is unmerciful, if he take the Forfeiture, and condemn those who would not be saved by him. The Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel, and all other the Methods which God hath used to reform and reclaim Sinners, are all Instances of his great goodness to us, of his zeal and concern for our Happiness; and if we still continue to reject and set them at nought how just, as well as severe, will be our Condemnation. Has he taken all imaginable

ginable care to oblige you to be kind to yourselves, and faithful to your truest interest, and will ye still forsake your own Mercies? If you thus wilfully seek your own ruin, how righteous will it be in God to plague you to the utmost extremity.

Let me therefore beseech you, even by all that is Sacred and Serious, by every thing that is dear and precious to you, by your best hopes, and the most important concern of your everlasting Being; to take pity upon your poor Souls, to consider the dangers whereto they are exposed, to consult and comply with the means of their Preservation.

Learn I pray you to affect your Hearts with a serious sense of your danger, to repent earnestly of your past sins, sincerely resolve to be more Holy, Watchful and Circumspect for the time to come; pray earnestly for the Graces of God's Holy Spirit; cherish in your Souls a lively Faith in the Mercies of God through Christ; and in all respects, as God shall enable you, and you shall be hereafter from time to time instructed, let your Prayers and your Endeavours be that you may be wise unto Salvation. And that you may abound in all spiritual Wisdom and Understanding, and may be accepted as faithful Servants of God and our Lord Jesus Christ in the great day of Accounts, as it is the earnest Prayer, so it shall be the constant endeavour of

Your affectionate Servant in Christ Jesus.

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